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ABSTRACT

This annual report details the 1997 activities of the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, the agency designated by the U.S. Department of Education as the regional educational laboratory responsible for developing national leadership and expertise in early childhood education. The report describes the partners involved and activities related to four major areas of concern: (1) quality early care and education; (2) education/training for educators and caregivers; (3) linking of services; and (4) equitable access to quality care for all children. Contact information is given for members of the Early Childhood Laboratory Network Program. The work of the National Center for Early Development and Learning is described. The impact of welfare reform is discussed. Principles to consider in planning to teach young children are examined. (KB)

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Early Childhood Education

1997 SERVEing Young Children

Specialty Area Annual Report

PS 025917

SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

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A Look Back

It's hard to believe that more than a year has passed since the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) was designated by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, as the regional educational laboratory responsible for developing national leadership and expertise in Early Childhood Education. Following a successful five years of working on improving transitions from preschool to early elementary school, we found ourselves being stretched to reach out and serve the population of children from birth to age eight and their families. In this new capacity, the SERVEing Young Children program within SERVE set in motion a whirl of activity. A nationwide needs assessment pointed to four areas of major concern to early childhood educators, caregivers and advocates: quality early care and education, education/training for caregivers and educators, linking of services, and equitable access to quality care for all children. These findings led us to seek partners in addressing these problems. During this year, we attended meetings to learn from and share information with our colleagues across the nation; published reports, shared successes, and developed materials; provided training and technical assistance to support innovators; visited sites where quality services were being provided; initiated efforts to study and document effective practice; searched the literature for strategies; and formed coalitions to leverage resources.

The purpose of this first specialty area report is to share some highlights of our year, showcase the good work of those closest to the children and families we seek to help, point to some resources, and take a look at what is ahead in our work. You will find articles informing you about the work of our partners and our programs. Feature articles on policy and practices in the field round out this issue. Through this report we hope to inform you, gain your support for our work, and join with you in improving services and systems that serve children and families.

Our Partners

Regional Educational Laboratories (REL)

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) program is the U.S. Department of Education's largest research and development investment. The purpose of the regional laboratories is to take the best educational research gathered from around the world and convert it into programs and practices that schools can use to improve students' learning. Although authorized by the U.S. Congress and administered by the U.S. Department of Education, each of the ten laboratories is governed by its own regional board. Each laboratory identifies the educational needs in its region and works to respond to those needs. Because many of the problems facing the United States' educational system transcend the boundaries of local school districts and states, the laboratories often come together to form a Laboratory Network Program (LNP).

Laboratory Network Program (LNP)

The Laboratory Network Program (LNP) allows laboratories to come together to collectively do work in greater depth and on a larger scale than they could do alone. In 1995, each laboratory was designated a Specialty Area in which to develop expertise and provide leadership to the other laboratories, and to the nation. SERVE received the designation as Specialty Lab for Early Childhood Education. In that role, SERVE staff leads the Early Childhood Laboratory Network Program.

Early Childhood Laboratory Network Program (ECLNP)

The Early Childhood Laboratory Network Program (ECLNP) is a partnership of regional educational laboratories that seeks to improve services to young children from birth to age eight and their families. Early Childhood Specialists from selected laboratories come together to form a collaborative network to deal with the common issues related to early childhood education. The end of 1996 marked the end of the first year of work for this program.

Led by SERVE, one of the first tasks of the ECLNP was to conduct a national needs assessment and identify the critical needs in early childhood education for the next five years. Four issues emerged from the information gathered during the needs assessment:

- quality early care and education
- education/training for caregivers and educators
- linking of services
- access, equity, and diversity

In order to address these issues, the following activities are being conducted (those activities marked with a ✓ are currently underway):

Quality Early Care and Education

- ✓ research and compile quality indicators
- ✓ use electronic communication to network and build awareness
- ✓ reach out to existing groups
- • agree on and build awareness about elements of quality
- ✓ develop and disseminate information about quality

Education/Training for Educators and Caregivers

- • determine criteria and compile lab training resources online
- • determine criteria, identify, and compile external training resources
- ✓ identify partners
- ✓ identify model programs
- • document site activities
- • develop reform strategies
- ✓ identify development sites
- • implement innovations
- • report on reform efforts

Linking of Services

- ✓ track/study the use of the document, Continuity in Early Childhood: A Framework for Home, School, and Community Linkages, as a tool for linking services in regional sites
- ✓ develop common training for use of the Framework
- • report on use of the document, Putting the Pieces Together: Comprehensive School-Linked Strategies for Children and Families

Policy Development

- ✓ compile and study policy decisions that impact early care and education
- ✓ plan and conduct a policy forum
- ✓ disseminate policy information

Over the next five years, the ECLNP will work together to make a national impact in improving early care and education by developing tools and services; collecting, synthesizing, and disseminating critical information to policymakers; identifying or developing effective models; and improving public awareness about quality care and education.

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National Center for Early Development & Learning

The new National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) has been collaborating with SERVE as the center begins five years of research studies aimed at boosting U. S. children's intellectual and social development.

Within weeks of establishing the center, NCEDL accepted an invitation to join the early childhood Laboratory Network Program, facilitated by SERVE. A workplan, based on a national needs identification process, has been created by representatives from the six participating labs and NCEDL.

Administratively housed at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NCEDL is funded through the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education.

Don Bailey, director of both the Frank Porter Graham Center and the NCEDL, said, "NCEDL's overarching purpose is to identify effective practices in the care and education of young children, determine the extent to which they are being used, identify barriers to them, and test results and models for improvement. We are generating knowledge about the complex ways children, families, programs, and communities influence developing youngsters, as well as the role of public policy."

NCEDL has divided its work into six strands: early child care quality, kindergarten transition, ecological interventions, early childhood policies, statistical model of extant and project data, and translation of research to practice. Researchers include senior faculty members at UNC-CH, the University of Virginia, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of California at Los Angeles.

One of the first items on NCEDL's agenda is a Policy Conference to examine current research about quality child care and the implications of welfare reform for quality child care. Initial planning has already involved representatives from the laboratory network program, according to Dr. James Gallager, UNC-CH, director of the NCEDL Policy Strand. Details are still being ironed out, but it is expected to take place in October 1997.

Dr. Bailey said the center will hold at least one major survey each year and sponsor an annual conference to

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National Center for Early Development & Learning

synthesize early childhood issues of national concern. For example, a nationwide survey examining kindergarten transition practices has been mailed to more than 10,000 kindergarten teachers by strand directors Dr. Robert Pianta, University of Virginia, and Dr. Martha Cox, UNC-CH.

A synthesis conference to apply current knowledge to current practice with infants and toddlers, principally those in out-of-home care, will be held this year, probably in the fall, according to Dr. Thelma Harms, UNC-CH, who is working in the Early Child Care Quality Strand and the Ecological Interventions Strand. Products and findings will be shared with a broad national audience.

The Research to Practice Strand is creating a national dáta base for broad-based dissemination purposes, and a new quarterly magazine, *Early Developments*, according to strand director Dr. Pamela Winton, UNC-CH. NCEDL's home page on the Internet can be found through http://www.fpg.unc.edu.

NCEDL's multidisciplinary approach means also building partnerships with constituents (parents, day care providers and administrators, teachers, the medical community and policymakers) through focus groups and advisory boards. Each strand is taking an individualized approach with the goal of involving diverse and inclusive groups in a variety of ways at each principal site. For instance, Dr. Carollee Howes of UCLA, co-director of the Quality Strand, has established a Consumer Advisory Board in California, and her co-director Dr. Richard Clifford of UNC-CH, has organized a similar one in North Carolina.

NCEDL Researcher James Gallagher, director of the Policy Strand, checks his notes during a joint meeting of the Policy and the Research to Practice strands at the FPG Center, UNC-CH. On the right are Paula Scher and her baby, Callie, members of the Consumer Advisory Board to the Research into Practice Strand.

Setting up the Statistical Modeling Strand is Dr. Peg Burchinal, UNC-CH, and working on the Ecological Interventions strand are Dr. Robert Bradley of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and Drs. Donna Bryant and Barbara Wasik, both of UNC-CH. Dr. Lynette Darkes, UNC-CH, is assistant NCEDL director.

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To join the NCEDL family and receive the latest research findings, fact sheets, policy and research briefs, and other information, please write:

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Policy Issues

Welfare Reform: It's Here

The 104th Congress and President Clinton have obliterated the concept of the permanent government entitlement. In April, Clinton signed into law the most radical overhaul in 60 years of the way the nation provides assistance to the poor. Since 1969, Presidents, commissions, and others have urged Congress to reform the multibillion dollar welfare system. President Clinton, in his 1994 State of the Union address, promised to fulfill his campaign pledge to "end welfare as we know it." In June 1994 his welfare proposal was introduced in the 103rd Congress. Since 1936, the nation's welfare system has been driven by a simple principle: If you are poor and eligible, you are guaranteed a check from the federal government; the prime goal being to provide income maintenance for people in poverty. Now that has changed.

Radical Changes

The change in thinking (about welfare and work) that began in 1988 racheted up significantly in the current welfare legislation, focusing on a goal of "promoting work and self-sufficiency and ending dependence." This shift fits a historical pattern of movement between two opposing philosophies. At one extreme is the notion that the poor are morally deficient and a welfare system should be designed as a "program of social control." At the other extreme is the belief that the poor are no different than other Americans, they simply lack money.

The recently passed legislation represents a philosophy which no longer envisions welfare as "income maintenance" or simply a way to raise the living standards of the poor. Instead, aid to disadvantaged families will be limited to five years and recipients will be required to work in exchange for those benefits. Proponents of the legislation envision welfare offices as job-placement centers, where applicants are steered toward training and work rather than simply handed a check. The federal program of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) will be eliminated, and instead, states will receive annual federal payments and use them to run their own systems. They can set stricter time limits and can establish new state requirements, for example, denying aid to parents who fail to immunize their children or keep them in school.

Clearly, the new legislation creates a much tougher system. In the future, welfare recipients who refuse to work will lose benefits. The same will be true of persons convicted of drug felonies and single mothers who refuse to help find the fathers of their babies. Legal immigrants who are not citizens will no longer be eligible for food stamps and other types of assistance. And childless adults will be eligible for food stamps for only three months

in any three-year period. A parallel goal of the legislation, moving fifty percent of welfare recipients into the work force by 2002, will be more difficult. Whether the welfare system as imagined by the bill's supporters will materialize is still a matter of bitter debate. But opponents are predicting dire consequences: families forced onto the streets and children hungry because of food stamp cuts.

All Not Yet Satisfied

Before signing the bill, Clinton had prodded Congress to come closer to his views on reforming welfare but preserved his options by staying silent about whether he would sign or veto the various versions as they churned through the legislative process. He finally announced his intentions just hours before the House passed legislation to end the federal guarantee of direct cash payments to the needy, limit assistance to five years, and give states wide freedom to design their own relief programs requiring work for benefits rather than traditional welfare. Clinton said he believed the measure has "serious flaws", the most important the elimination of benefits for legal immigrants. He believes that to end many welfare programs for most immigrants has "nothing to do with welfare reform; it is simply a budget-saving measure, and it is not right." President Clinton said it is unfair to say to legal immigrants that they can serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, as many do, but that they are barred from receiving the same kinds of help from government as full citizens, including food stamps, medical assistance, and other benefits. Clinton said that he would work to correct the bill's deficiencies with later legislation in the 105th Congress.

Welfare Reform

Under the new welfare reform bill:

- AFDC and smaller programs are folded into annual block grants to states.
- Spending is reduced by $55 billion over six years, cutting food stamps and aid to legal immigrants.
- A five-year lifetime limit is imposed on welfare benefits.
- Recipients are required to begin working two years after going on welfare.
- Food stamps are permitted for only three months in any three-year period unless individuals work part time.
- Most federal aid, including Medicaid and cash welfare for five years, is denied to future legal immigrants.
- It is more difficult for children to receive federal disability payments for mental problems.
- Parents who do not pay child support will face more severe penalties.

There was unusually sharp criticism from liberals, including Sen. Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), who has been active on the welfare reform issue for nearly 30 years and who had warned Clinton that this measure would lead to devastating increases in the number of children living in poverty. Also, advocates for the poor were not reserved in their disappointment. David S. Liederman, executive director of the Child Welfare League of America, said, "to call this proposal 'reform' is a joke. The President says families will be better off with the changes set forth in this legislation." Leiderman said, "That is absurd. The debate is now more about politics than real reform."

Effects on Young Children and Families

Many questions still remain as to how welfare reform will affect young children and their families. For example, will the expanded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which increases work rewards, promote sustained employment to AFDC mothers? (Longitudinal studies indicate that many persons who work their way off AFDC are still poor—and that some return to AFDC.) Can work programs for young mothers reduce or prevent long-term AFDC enrollment? Will states be able to provide high-quality, or even adequate child care for poor children? Because of the emphasis on work, many have speculated that changing the country's welfare system will create significant stress for the existing system of early childhood services. It has far-reaching implications for the quality, accessibility, and affordability of services for poor as well as working families. As the legislation becomes reality, those who work with the poor, including educators, social services providers, and others will be watching for answers to these questions and observing what this landmark reform reaps.

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A View From the Field

Five Principles to Consider in Planning to Teach

By Esther Egley and Cathy Grace

Many times, parents question the activities and methods used at their children's school. There is nothing wrong with questioning; it is even a good idea to question. However, adults tend to compare and judge what is seen in schools by the methods used when they were in school. Some of the practices used in school a decade ago are still considered sound educational practices. But how can they be judged and evaluated?

Today, there is an abundance of research that documents effective educational practices for young children; research that is important to teachers as they plan instruction for their students, but also important to parents in working with children at home in support of the child's total learning and development.

This vast array of research can be condensed into five key principles to consider when working with young children:

1. **A young child learns as a total person.** Knowledge and skills must be learned through all areas...physical, social, emotional, and intellectual...to help students learn how to learn and establish the foundation for continuous, lifelong learning.

2. **Young children grow through similar stages of development, but at different rates and in different styles.** Every student is unique. Different levels of development and understanding affect every learning task. Students must be allowed to move at their own pace in acquiring skills.

3. **The way a child feels about him/herself and the sense of competence he/she has in relation to learning impacts every learning act.** The way a tudent receives information may be as important to learning as the information received. Methods, climate, atmosphere, and teacher attitude all affect the student's self esteem.

4. **Children learn best in active ways through interaction with the environment and with other children and adults.** Teacher planning time is best spent preparing the environment for active learning. As students interact with each other, with the teacher, and with a variety of materials, they apply all types of learning processes and construct knowledge for themselves.

5. **Children learn best when they are taught through an integrated curriculum that allows for pattern-building and selection of a wide variety of sensory data.** Projects, learning centers, and real-live activities related to the interests of students promote learning of concepts and skills through application and meaningful practice.

Principle 1: A child learns as a total person. This means that in order for effective learning to occur, learning that is long-term, a child needs to be completely engrossed in the act of learning. The teacher or parent considering this principle must recognize that the most effective learning doesn't take place only when a child is completing a paper and pencil activity. Instead, the most valuable learning will take place when a child is supported to learn through all areas of development: physical, social, emotional, and intellectual.

Consider this scenario. A 5-year-old boy walked into the kitchen and asked for an egg. His mother asked why and he replied, "I'm going to put it on the brick wall outside and knock it off." The mother, an educator, knew he was thinking about Humpty Dumpty and that he was trying to learn as a "total person." But since she had recently paid bills and was still money conscious, she gave a typical response, "Now you already know what's going to happen if you knock an egg off of that wall, and anyway, eggs cost money. I can't afford to give you eggs to knock off the wall every time you want to do something like that." The boy, being very determined, replied, "I know, Mamma, but I just want to do it. I want to see it. Please just let me try it." She gave him the egg and a few more minutes later he returned and asked for some tape. This time she didn't say anything, just gave him the tape and smiled. A few more minutes went by and then the back door slammed. He stomped in and said in an upset voice, "I can't put it back together. I tried and tried. But I know what I'm going to do. Can I have some more tape and a shoe box? I'm going to put so much tape on it that it will never break, no matter how may times I knock it off the wall."

In this scenario, the child was learning as a total person in that:

- Learning was occurring as he was physically involved; actively conducting the experiment, actively testing hypotheses, and actively seeking answers.
- Learning was occurring as he was socially involved; discussing the results with another person, discussing possible solutions and discoveries.
- Learning was occurring as he was emotionally involved; thinking of the activity himself based on his own past experiences, being excited about the idea of the activity, becoming frustrated with the initial results, and then becoming satisfied as he thought of a final solution to the problem.
- Learning was occurring intellectually, not only the intended learning but even more; discovering for himself what was meant by the phrase, "and all the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again."

Principle 1, a child learns as a total person, suggests to teachers and parents to provide opportunities for children to engage in processes that involve all areas of the child's development: physical, social, emotional, and intellectual. The most important skill teachers and parents can teach students and children is to "learn how to learn." To teach

this skill most effectively, opportunities should be planned for a child to learn as a total person. In following principle one, the child can be assisted in building a foundation for continuous, life-long learning.

Principle 2: Young children grow through similar stages of development, but at different rates and in different styles. A mother is frantic. Her 5-year-old son is not interested in learning the letters of the alphabet. He likes to look at books but is not seeking to read them by himself. Other children in her son's age group are recognizing letters of the alphabet and some are even reading. She is considering having her son evaluated to determine if he has a learning problem. Is this an appropriate step for the mother to take?

Families that take the time to become familiar with the stages that children pass through on their way to adolescence and finally adulthood are more likely to enjoy their children's passage. Today, many communities have facilities identified as a Family Resource Center or a Parent Center that will offer a variety of resources for families. Books and video tapes are usually in these centers for checkout at no cost to provide parents with information on issues that relate to guidance and discipline, toilet training, developmental characteristics of children by age, and developmentally appropriate learning materials and activities to be used at home. Also, parenting classes and seminars are often offered at no cost that address concerns and problems of first time parents as well as those who have several children.

As children enter school, parental expectations of what their children should know are often determined by social expectations rather than what child study experts tell us about children's physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities at various ages. Most information on child development is reported in what is referred to as norms. This means that thousands of observations reveal that the majority of children exhibit a characteristic or behavior at a certain age. There are variations within the age span that allow for children to develop at their own rate without being considered developmentally delayed. Young children often exhibit periods of rapid growth in one area while another area of development remains temporarily stagnant of falls behind. The young child who experiences rapid motor development—beginning to walk or climb—may show a decline in the development of language during that period. A child who is beginning to read must have a good visual pursuit in following the lines on the page of a book, appreciation for the fact that the letters of the page comprise words that represents objects, thoughts, and feeling, and life experiences that make the words have personal meaning. If pushed into reading before the child is developmentally ready, he/she can develop emotional as well as learning problems simply because his/her developmental calendar was not respected or consulted.

Parents with two or more children often fall into the trap of comparing one child to the other. One mother was heard to complain, "At this age, Tommy was able to tie his shoes and work a 2-piece puzzle. His sister can't tie her shoes and won't sit still long enough to work puzzles. All she wants to do is talk, draw picture, and play with the other children. I wonder if she will need extra help when she goes to school?" This example points to the

fact that parents often borrow trouble when they expect their children to perform exactly as a brother or a neighbor has in certain situations. The sister in the example exhibits small motor development through her drawing just as her brother did in working puzzles, yet the mother couldn't recognize the behaviors as being compatible and worried needlessly. Good public schools that respect the child and the importance of following child development principles in the teaching of young children will succeed in large measure because they are focusing on the child an how to make the subject matter relevant to her life experiences. The knowledge she gains in how to solve the problems she will be facing in the future will allow her, if given the opportunity, a means to change the course of this nation in much the same way Thomas Edison or Martin Luther King, Jr., has done.

Principle 3: The way a child feels about himself/herself and the sense of competence he/she has in relation to learning, impacts every learning act. My neighbor said to me, "The fifth grade was a turning point in my life. Until then, I felt that I was a poor reader, not as important as other students, and incapable of producing good work. In the fifth grade, however, I had a teacher who kept telling me that I could "do it." She was patient, not only with me, but with many of my classmates who were also having problems. In her classroom, I felt accepted. I felt that she believed I was special and capable of doing well. And for some reason, what I perceived her to believe, I also began to believe. As my feelings about myself improved, so did my achievement." Then my neighbor said, "Isn't that strange?"

No, this isn't strange at all. This scenario is an example of one of the guiding principles of raising and teaching children: How and what children think of themselves affects every opportunity they have to learn. Children's thoughts about themselves can range from feelings of adequacy to inadequacy, worthiness to unworthiness, confidence to nonconfidence, etc. A child who "feels" capable of succeeding in a learning assignment will accept the challenge with little hesitation, proceed with confidence, be able to succeed with undue stress, and finally complete the task. Another child, who "feels" inadequate for the job will refrain from the challenge or become overly upset when asked to proceed. The lack of confidence and degree of stress felt by this child can inhibit his/her level of accomplishment and learning.

Parents and teachers need to be mindful of the fact that there is a relationship between children's feelings about themselves and their school success. Dr. William Purkey says that the application of this principle involves ensuring successful experiences for all children. This doesn't imply that the instruction level should always be easy or a "sure thing." Rather, parents and teachers must provide challenges that place success within children's reach. Success builds confidence, and confidence nurtures achievement. A child who develops a positive self-concept has a greater chance of being successful in school. A child who is successful in school is likely to develop a positive self-concept.

Parents can help children to develop positive self-concepts by providing them with encouragement, support, and honest and constructive comments. Time, attention, and responsibilities appropriate for the child's age can also contribute to positive feelings about oneself. The parental actions will become gifts that enable children to grow in the self-confidence that is needed in order for children to view themselves positively.

In the school setting, teachers can also help children to develop positive self-concepts by providing a variety of experiences that will allow success. Like my neighbor's fifth grade teacher, they must make children believe they can "do it." No, it's not strange at all; how and what children think of themselves affects every opportunity they have to learn.

Principle 4: Children learn best in active ways through interaction with the environment and with other children and adults. Walking down the halls of a local school provides an opportunity to see learning in action. Planning a study on the community involves the entire class. Decisions are made as to the things the class wants to learn about the place they call home. The teacher guides the class and interjects information at appropriate times, sometimes answering questions with other questions to challenge the thinking of the students. Research is planned; taking a trip to the library to gather historical facts about the community and its early leaders and interviewing townspeople are strategies that these students employ. Vocabulary words are listed on a chart and new ones added as more interviews are conducted. Students construct sentences using the new words and begin to formulate a diary of the daily activities. The teacher uses the activity to teach capitalization and punctuation to the class. Taping the sessions makes for an easy way to review the information and to list new words the class discovers. A small group plans to construct a model of the town square the way it looked before the killer tornado moved through and destroyed many new buildings. Using old photographs, the group studies the various buildings and placement, comparing the square with the way it looks now. Decisions as to the building materials to be used, the size of the buildings, and who will be responsible for bringing the materials are part of the work assignment. Measurements are made as to the space needed for the replica and calculations are completed relating to the amount of building materials needed in order to complete the model.

Facts are compiled as to the industries and businesses supporting the community. The chief officer of an industry speaks to the class about the importance of business in the community. The children ask questions of their visitor from a list they had developed prior to his arrival. The responses are recorded by the teacher for later use by the class. Local physicians and dentists speak to the class about the importance of health facilities in the community. One physician who has resided in the community for over thirty years describes the way it was then and how it is now. He shows pictures of the hospital in 1937 and one of the buildings today to add to the class community museum display.

The word problems that deal with subtraction and addition also contain information about the community, and students construct additional problems for students in other classes to solve. A time line covers one wall. It provides a historical review of major events that occurred in the community. Organizing and using data in meaningful ways is part of the classroom designated as the chain of events area.

The classroom described above is full of "real" traditional skill building opportunities. For years, parents and teachers have acknowledged in conversation that children are more interested in the subject at hand if they actively participate in the process of learning about it. The teacher who stands in front of a classroom of students and tells

them the history of their community is using one method of instruction that is referred to as teacher directed. The classroom described here is one that reflects a combination of several methods. Teacher directed instruction is one method that is used, but other methods that lead to problem solving by the students and the opportunity for small groups of children to apply knowledge in meaningful ways is also present.

Toddlers and preschool children force parents and teachers to allow them opportunities to actively participate in learning about their world. Parents encourage their children to taste new foods, climb upon a tricycle and peddle, and to see and touch new items in their world. Society would consider it to be deprivation of a child to prevent him/her from safely exploring and experiencing the world. The world of academics is no different. Responsible teaching by parents and teachers encompasses a variety of methods that enable the child to become increasingly independent and secure in the knowledge that he/she has acquired.

Teachers and parents need opportunities to reflect as to how to best involve children in the process of learning. Good teaching, whether at home or school, is accomplished through the study of children and the research of how they best learn. Attention to how children learn is critical if parents and teachers are to take advantage of every moment. The activity of learning is one that is truly amazing and one that should not be addressed as frivolous. We have too much at stake.

Principle 5: Children learn best when they are taught through and integrated curriculum that allows for pattern-building and selection of a wide variety of sensory data. Recently, I heard parents discussing the Vacation Bible School that their children had attended during the summer months. The parents were amazed at the level of activity they saw as their children learned Bible history. They said that model cities appeared in the church hallways, projects depicting Biblical life lined the fellowship walls, and lyrics echoed through the rafters as the children dramatized familiar Bible stories. One parent said, "I just can't believe how much they learned in such a short period of time about the Bible. It really is remarkable."

True, the learning process really is an interesting operation. It is also exciting to watch. What these parents observed is a perfect example of what educators call integrated learning which is a key principal of how children learn best.

Most adults today were taught in elementary school through a traditional approach to teaching; Reading at 8:00 a.m., Spelling at 9:00 a.m., Math at 10:00 a.m., etc. However, research of the past ten years indicates that teaching is more effective when presented in an integrated manner; teaching all subject areas simultaneously through a unifying theme.

For example, consider the teacher who discussed and decided with the class to study the post office during the two-week period prior to the end of school. Together, they planned to 1) establish a class post office, 2) write and mail letters to classmates through the classroom mail system managed by the students, 3) visit the local Post Office on a field trip, 4) prepare letters to mail to their classmates through the United States Postal System, and 5) initiate a summer pen pal program to keep students reading and writing throughout the summer.

Through these and other simple activities, the students were "knee-deep" in objectives from every subject that is taught in elementary school. How does the postal system work? (Social Studies) What is the correct form of addressing an envelope? (Language Arts, Spelling, Writing, Reading) What punctuation marks are needed in addressing envelopes and writing letters? (Language Arts, English, Writing) How much does it cost to mail a letter? (Math) How quickly will the letters be delivered to the home addresses? (Math) Who will receive the letters first and last? (Geography, Map Skills) Etc.

Not only are these and other objectives being taught in this scenario, but the students are also interested, involved, and enthusiastic because the activities are personal, meaningful, and integrated.

Consider the last several times you were in situations attempting to listen and learn a task or a skill. Probably, you were attentive and learned more efficiently when the material was important and applicable to your needs. Probably, you really learned the material when you had the opportunity to try the task or skill in your "real-life" situation. But also remember the difficulty you had as an adult in learning situations when the message was not important to you or it wasn't presented in the context of your needs. If relevancy is important to adult learning, then it is even more important to young learners.

All learning becomes more relevant when taught in connection with the need for the learning such as mailing letters to classmates. Problem solving tasks become more meaningful when embedded in a context that is useful to the learner such as buying stamps and determining the mail routes.

One of the keys to effective teaching is to make the curriculum practical and relevant through an integrated format. Through integrated learning, isolated facts and independent skills will be introduced and practiced in meaningful activities thus leading to lifelong learning rather than learning that is retained only long enough to take the test.

When taken seriously, these five principles can be applied to school and home to provide children with the greatest opportunities for lifelong learning.

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Bredekamp, S. and Rosegrant, T., *Reaching Potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment for Young Children, Vol. 1*. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Washington, DC 1993.

We would like to thank Esther Egley and Cathy Grace for contributing to this newsletter and providing our readers with "a view from the field." Esther Egley is currently an assistant professor at Mississippi State University in Starkville, MS, where she teaches in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Cathy Grace is the Director of the Family Resource Center located in Tupelo, MS.

This will be a feature in each annual newsletter. If you are interested in submitting an article, please contact us.

Coming Attractions

Upcoming Early Childhood Conferences and Workshops

National Head Start
May 25-31, 1997
Boston, MA

National PTA
June 18-21, 1997
Kansas City Convention Center
Kansas City, MO

National Association for the Education of Young Children Professional Development Conference
June 25-28, 1997
Seattle, WA

National Black Child Development Institute
October 1-7, 1997
Atlanta, GA

SERVE Second Annual Forum on School Improvement
October 12-14, 1997
Atlanta, GA

Policy Conference
October 1997
Chapel Hill, NC

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
November 9-11, 1997
Charleston, SC

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
November 12-15, 1997
Anaheim, CA

ZERO to THREE/National Center for Clinical Infant Programs
December 5-7, 1997
Nashville, TN